

New terminal at Wattay airport slated for July opening

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The enlargement of Wattay International Airport in Vientiane is now 83 percent complete and is on track to meet a projected end-of-June finishing date.

Head of the Wattay International Airport Expansion Project, Mr Sengsangdouane Chanthavong, who is Deputy Director of the Aerodrome Division, Department of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, told *Vientiane Times* the new facilities would become operational in July.

According to the contract, the project was set to take 1001 days but it now appears likely that the job will be complete 60 days before the planned deadline. Work on the new terminal began in December 2015.

Construction of the



The new immigration area at Wattay International Airport.

terminal is being financed by a concessional low-interest loan of about US\$61 million from the government of Japan.

Mr Sengsangdouane said that under the loan agreement, the money must be repaid by the Lao government over a period of

30 years, with repayments to begin in the 11th year after project completion.

The number of
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passengers passing through the airport increased by an annual average of 9 percent from the years 2000 to 2009.

In 2016 the airport handled about 1,108,000 international and 412,000 domestic passengers.

This figure is expected to increase to about 1,151,000 international and 460,000 domestic passengers in 2023.

The existing international terminal was built to accommodate a supposed demand of about 250,000 annual passengers in 2005. Construction of the terminal was financed by Japanese grant aid under a project titled "Improvement of Wattay International Airport (1995-1998)".

But the present number

of passengers far exceeds the supposed demand and has increased by a factor of 2.8. During peak hours, there are there so many boarding passengers that they cannot be accommodated in the space in front of the check-in counter.

More and more people are passing through the airport as Laos becomes more closely integrated with the region and the world for business and leisure

purposes.

Before Japan stepped in with grant aid, the domestic passenger terminal was used as an international passenger terminal for about 50 years after its construction, and its condition deteriorated.

In subsequent years the enlargement of the aircraft parking apron and maintenance of security equipment were funded by Japanese grant aid under a project titled "Security

Improvement of Vientiane International Airport (2011-2013)".

This enabled large aircraft to land and take off but it became necessary to expand the passenger terminal so that the airport could respond to the future increase in demand as well as ensure convenience and safety.

Based on these needs, the Lao government asked the Japanese government for a loan to enlarge the passenger terminal so that travellers can be processed more quickly and conveniently.